Improving outcomes for children in the Foundation Stage in maintained schools

Process-based targets in the Foundation Stage
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Audience

These materials are intended for:

- practitioners in maintained schools;
- local authority inspectors (LAI) and Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) consultants;
- other consultants providing subject-specific support;
- Foundation Stage advisers and consultants;
- others in the local authority who provide support and guidance to schools;
- senior local authority staff responsible for statutory local authority outcomes duty.

Aims of this publication

This publication aims to:

- support schools in improving outcomes for children in the Foundation Stage;
- support the effective development of the foundations of curricular target-setting in all schools;
- develop a process for using the stepping stones and early learning goals to promote progress through assessment for learning;
- support the use of observational assessment and other evidence of children’s early learning and development to identify their next steps in learning;
- help practitioners and settings to use this information to:
  - strengthen continuity across the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1;
  - establish a deeper understanding of how the conditions for learning enrich learning and development opportunities for young children;
- provide summary guidance for local authority colleagues to illustrate how careful attention to early learning and development opportunities supports Foundation Stage Profile outcomes for children at the end of the Foundation Stage;
- illustrate the most effective ways of improving outcomes for children at the end of the Foundation Stage through the 15 local authority case studies;
- show how these approaches were founded on improving the conditions for learning by setting process-based targets for practitioners as indicated by the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) research.
Introduction

This publication aims to clarify what is meant by target-setting in the Foundation Stage for maintained schools. A good early learning and development target will improve the learning and teaching process. It is as likely to be framed around child-initiated activity (‘play’) as around adult-led teaching. Children's achievements and their development will depend, among other things, on previous experience, gender and date of birth. Approaches to learning and teaching in the Foundation Stage must match the development, age and prior experience of the learner. The learning and development opportunities planned for the child, the group and the class will be shaped by two factors:

1. the principles and frameworks in *Birth to three matters* and the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage*;
2. the particular needs of individuals and different groups of children.

Practitioners in the Foundation Stage should plan focuses for their work with children on the basis of what is appropriate ‘for this child, in this place, at this time’. The Foundation Stage is an integral yet distinct phase of the National Curriculum. Its implementation in schools is a statutory requirement (Education Act 2002).

The effectiveness of the implementation of the statutory curriculum for the Foundation Stage and its statutory assessment varies considerably across England. Where local authorities, settings and practitioners have effectively implemented the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage*, as the *EPPE* study indicates, all children make good progress, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds make excellent progress.

These materials, *Improving outcomes for children in the Foundation Stage in maintained schools*, are aimed particularly at settings where the Foundation Stage is in the early stages of development, and provide a range of case studies that illustrate how local authorities (LAs), schools and settings have swiftly and effectively improved the conditions for learning and the outcomes for children as measured by the *Foundation Stage Profile*. The first point of reference for assessment and planning birth to five should always be *Birth to three matters*, the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* and the *Foundation Stage Profile Handbook*. Under the Childcare Act 2006, the Foundation Stage will be superseded by the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (EYFS) (2008) which brings together the principles and frameworks in *Birth to three matters* and the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* and national standards for day care and childminding.

The approaches recommended in this publication are appropriate for all settings currently delivering *Birth to three matters* and the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* and preparing to deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage.
Impact of the Childcare Act 2006

The Childcare Act 2006 implements and fulfils commitments outlined in the Government’s ten-year strategy for childcare, Choice for parents, the best start for children.

The main provisions in the Act will ensure two key objectives, as follows.

Firstly, all children up to five will have high-quality early learning and care and better access to early childhood services – giving them the best start in life. This will be achieved through:

- an outcomes duty, which underpins a children’s centre for every community. Local authorities, working with their NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners, will have a duty to improve the outcomes of all children up to five and reduce inequalities between them;
- an entitlement for parents to free integrated care and learning for all three- and four-year-olds, which will, over time, increase in duration and become more flexible;
- a new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which establishes a framework to support providers in all sectors in delivering consistently high quality integrated care and learning to support the development of all children from birth to five. All registered providers of Early Years provision (defined under the Act as integrated childcare and early learning from birth to five) will be required to deliver the EYFS.

Secondly, all working parents will have access to a wide range of childcare where they can be confident that their children will thrive and be well cared for, enabling them to have greater choice about balancing work and family life. This will be achieved through:

- a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare so that parents can exercise choice. Local authorities will have the lead role in facilitating the childcare market to ensure it meets the needs of working parents and those making the transition to work, in particular those on low incomes or with disabled children;
- broadening the existing duty on local authorities to ensure parents and prospective parents have access to information about the full range of services they may need in raising their children and to provide help with finding appropriate childcare;
- reforming the regulation and inspection framework for childcare and Early Years provision to raise quality and help parents make informed choices about the setting their child attends; to maintain mandatory registration of provision up to age eight; and to extend the new streamlined regime to a wide variety of provision through the Ofsted Childcare Register.
The process

How do I frame early learning and development targets in the Foundation Stage?

As part of their work for the Foundation Stage/ISP pilot, Tameside LA developed a simple process for target-setting based on early years best practice as outlined in the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage.

Tameside framework for identifying learning focuses to support the whole-school curricular target (ISP)

1. Identify whole-school focus and Year 2 layered targets for literacy and numeracy as advised in the ISP.

2. Using the Foundation Stage Profile scales, highlight the points that support the whole-school focus and ask: ‘Which points would I expect a child to have achieved at the end of the Foundation Stage if they are to be successful in... (see Y2 target, for example, using problem solving) by the end of Year 2?’

3. Having identified a wide range of Profile points, possibly across all six areas of learning, you will need to decide which points are most appropriate for your children at this time. You will need to take account of their current interests, their level of development, your planned topics and the information gained from observations.

4. Using the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage, identify an early learning goal (ELG) that can serve as a broad Foundation Stage focus and then select targets from the stepping stones, according to the children’s individual needs. Ask: ‘What are the next steps that this group of children needs to take in order to progress towards the identified ELG?’

5. Choose either to write layered targets in child-friendly language or to write them for the adults to understand. Formulate a statement or phrase that can become a focus for the whole class, so that the children have an understanding of the curriculum focus, for example, ‘We can tell you why we like the story.’

6. Plan to involve all team members in the Foundation Stage, so that all staff understand the Foundation Stage curricular focus. Consider how the setting can improve the conditions for learning, so that children can be supported to achieve their targets through self-initiated activities. Discuss teaching strategies for all practitioners to use; identify areas for continuing professional development for all staff; and discuss how to share the curriculum focus with parents.

7. Use observations, photographs and parents’ comments to provide evidence of children making progress towards their targets. The Tameside record books can be used for tracking children’s progress.
What makes a good target?

A good target has a specific focus

This will be an area for development, improvement and enhancement – ‘building on one’s previous best’. This principle applies to the setting, the staff and the children. Good targets need to be ambitious, involve those responsible for delivering the sought outcomes and integrate evidence, analysis and best practice. The purpose of a target is to improve the quality of involvement, engagement and well-being of all those involved.

A good target will improve the learning and teaching process

It is as likely to be framed around promoting learning through play (child-initiated activity) as around adult-led teaching. The stepping stones and early learning goals are not age-related. Although these goals are presented in a hierarchical order, not all children will conform to this sequence of learning. Their achievements and their development will depend, among other things, on previous experience, gender and date of birth.

Schools and settings have their own ways of documenting learning and recording achievement from birth to age five

The stepping stones and the early learning goals provide a broad view of the range of developmental pathways children may follow during the Foundation Stage.

Staff should track children’s progress through the use of practitioner assessment

This publication illustrates how staff can look at the provision of a broad, rich Foundation Stage curriculum while also reflecting on how to promote a particular skill or aspect of learning in the whole-school curricular target-setting process.

When planning next steps in learning in the Foundation Stage, all six areas of learning are equally important and interdependent and are informed by formative assessment

The ‘next step’ is an ‘informed target’, linked to the whole-school curricular target focus and is based on the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage.

An informed target may be for the individual, the group or the cohort and should promote progress, while being broad enough to reflect individual strengths, interests and learning styles.

Where do I start?

Review your Foundation Stage Profile data, as described in Continuing the learning journey, section 4. This section is included in the CD-ROM.

Does this review indicate that:

- the Foundation Stage is appropriately resourced?
- staff will benefit from training in:
  - child development?
  - how to develop an appropriate Foundation Stage curriculum, using the areas of learning?
  - the relevance of Birth to three matters approaches to younger children?
- observational assessment?
- subject-specific knowledge?
- PSED, Communicating matters and/or the SEAL materials?

- resourcing is used effectively to promote learning?

Curricular targets relate to what children will be learning, and are appropriate across the whole primary three to eleven age range. In the Foundation Stage, practitioners plan the focus of their work with children on the basis of what is appropriate ‘for this child, in this place, at this time’. The *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* provides exemplification for planning, teaching and assessing against the stepping stones and early learning goals. Many examples of good practice already exist in ISP schools. For example, in one school the curricular target was to improve personal interpretation and response to literature. This was interpreted in the Foundation Stage through the use of talk and role-play in response to a shared story. Many Foundation Stage practitioners relate their assessment focuses to the whole-school curricular target focus.

When setting curricular targets for the school ask yourself these questions.

- Are the targets appropriate for children in the Foundation Stage or can they be adapted to meet differentiated needs?
- Do the targets link with the planned focuses for work for children in the Foundation Stage?
- Does the whole-school target-setting process incorporate an understanding of how young children learn in the Foundation Stage?
- Are the targets:
  - informed by a knowledge of how young children learn, to include sufficient opportunities for children to make individual choices in their own learning to follow their own needs and interests
  - framed by adults and supported by appropriate subject knowledge?

**Where do I set the starting points in the Foundation Stage?**

Starting points will be found within the stepping stones of the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage or Birth to three matters*. These will vary depending on children’s prior experience and achievements.

In general, maintained schools use data about prior attainment to set targets. In the ISP also, whole-school curricular targets are identified through the analysis of data. This is not possible in the Foundation Stage as it is the starting point of a child’s school experience. Entry to the Foundation Stage varies considerably across the country. Entry may be at the beginning of:

- the Foundation Stage, to a maintained nursery;
- the second year of the Foundation Stage, to a Reception class;
- the second or third term of the Reception year, depending on birth date.

This wide variation in starting points means that the individual rate of attendance during the Foundation Stage varies considerably: a child may have experienced two years of full-time
Foundation Stage provision, a month or so during the summer term, or may not have attended any setting prior to Year 1. The Foundation Stage is a statutory key stage: unlike later key stages, it is not compulsory.

There is no national data collection before the Foundation Stage Profile which is finalised at the end of the Foundation Stage. Ofsted expects schools to use their own systems of assessment, or those recommended by the LA, to decide what children are attaining on entry to the Foundation Stage. Whatever system is used should conform to the statutory requirements for the Foundation Stage curriculum and its assessment and should be based on observational assessment.

In the Foundation Stage, curricular targets should also be informed by:

- the Foundation Stage curriculum, as planned by Early Years staff in response to the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage;
- learning priorities identified by analysis of Foundation Stage Profile data;
- analysis of observational assessment.

Developing appropriate curricular targets for the Foundation Stage, whether as part of good practice or as part of the ISP, may occur in a range of ways. The school should be analysing information from the Foundation Stage Profile to identify development priorities within their Foundation Stage provision. Foundation Stage targets will also be developed in response to a whole-school focus that considers outcomes at the end of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, framed using the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage.

The role of Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) in supporting achievement needs to be constantly considered within all curricular target focuses. It is also important to emphasise that the next step in learning may be in another area of learning altogether. For example, in the case of writing, access to large equipment (Physical Development) and a range of creative stimuli (Creative Development) may be the logical next step to improve achievement in the writing scale.

The most important part of the process is to refer back to the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage, paying particular attention to the general guidance on learning and teaching for the area of learning that relates to the chosen scale points, and the stepping stones and early learning goals for those scale points. For some children, it may be appropriate to refer to Development matters in Birth to three matters. With the introduction of Early Years Foundation Stage, the same process should be followed with regard to Development matters.
Next steps in learning in the Foundation Stage

Framing early learning and development targets in the Foundation Stage is underpinned by an understanding of how young children develop and learn. Foundation Stage practitioners plan for ‘next steps’ in learning on the basis of Birth to three matters and the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage in the context of Early Years Foundation Stage. In Early Years next steps are reviewed frequently, sometimes daily, after observational assessment. The age of the children and the range and diversity of their early development give Foundation Stage targets (‘next steps’) their distinctiveness.

Foundation Stage targets must derive from the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage; and from 2008 from the new statutory framework Early Years Foundation Stage. Young children develop confidence in themselves as learners and their emerging skills progress rapidly across all six areas of learning, but they are dependent on adults to create the right emotional and physical learning environment. Provision of a broad, rich Foundation Stage curriculum based on the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage is essential to support children’s learning.

We need to agree what we mean by ‘curriculum’. We are defining it as the educational programme, or what you want children to learn; what you plan and provide to help them learn. But it’s more than that. It’s everything the children do and see and hear and feel while they’re with you in your setting. It includes unplanned as well as planned activities.

- Firstly, the activities and experiences that you have thought out for children and the work that you do with them – the planned and offered, or taught curriculum.
- Finally, the things that children get to know and understand – the received or the learned curriculum.

A high quality curriculum:

1. is in the hands of practitioners;
2. is dependent on practitioners and parents working together;
3. ensures that children are secure and confident;
4. respects the cultural differences and abilities of all children;
5. builds on what children already know and extends their interests;
6. uses varied approaches and teaching methods;
7. recognises feelings and involves other people;
8. encourages children to learn for themselves;
9. is dynamic.

A Training support framework for the Foundation Stage, DfES 2002, page 11

The stepping stones, early learning goals and Development matters are a developmental framework for guidance and do not in themselves constitute a curriculum. The curriculum is
planned by the practitioner to reflect the interests, strengths and learning needs of individual children. When planning approaches to curricular target setting, all six areas of learning are equally important and interdependent and are informed by formative assessment.

Children who begin their education in a learning environment that is vibrant, purposeful, challenging and supportive stand the best chance of developing into confident and successful learners. Effective learning environments are created over time as the result of practitioners and parents working together, thinking and talking about children’s learning and planning how to promote it.

Good planning is the key to making children’s learning effective, exciting, varied and progressive. Good planning enables practitioners to build up knowledge about how individual children learn and make progress. It also provides opportunities for practitioners to think and talk about how to sustain a successful learning environment. This process works best when all practitioners working in the setting are involved. Practitioners who work alone will benefit from opportunities to discuss their plans with others working in similar settings.


The assessment process (observation, reflection, modified planning) provides the information needed to shape a relevant and appropriate learning journey that fulfils national aspirations for achievement at the end of the Foundation Stage. Two schools may have the same whole-school curricular targets for the end of Key Stage 2, but still need to develop different learning journeys for their Foundation Stage.

The assessment process in Early Years begins and ends with each child:

- What types of activity engage and motivate this child?
- Is it best to plan the provocations for learning outdoors or indoors?
- What are the most appropriate next steps in learning that will best support, extend and develop this child’s skills, knowledge and understanding?

Much of this information can be gathered from parents and carers.

Promoting quality

In the Foundation Stage individual learning goals (or ‘next steps’ or ‘targets’, depending on the local usage):

- are based on the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage;
- are used to support child involvement and adult interactions;
- are founded on planned provision that supports child-initiated learning;
- relate to all areas of learning.
To support the continuous review of quality in the early years, these qualitative targets can be monitored and evaluated, and if necessary measured quantitatively through:

- the *Early childhood environmental rating scale-extension (ECERS-E)* scales;
- the *Key Elements of Effective Practice (KEEP)* self-evaluation framework (DfES 1201-2005);
- monitoring and evaluating child involvement and adult engagement.

The same purposes may be achieved by quality assurance schemes that support and promote reflective practice, informed self-evaluation and targets for improvement. This approach links directly to the work on self-evaluation promoted by Ofsted and the Training and development agency for schools (TDA).

The principles for assessment for learning help practitioners to put the child at the heart of the learning process. In the Foundation Stage this means developing strategies for using observational assessment to inform planning:

- formative assessment based on observations and other evidence of learning;
- discussions with the children about their learning wherever possible and involving them in self-assessment;
- discussions with parents and carers to illuminate achievements in the home and family;
- the involvement of children in planning their next steps in learning;
- manageable processes for documenting and sharing evidence of learning;
- the interpretation of observational evidence to identify key learning;
- the involvement of parents/carers and learning support assistants in the assessment process.

**Targets for practitioners in the Foundation Stage**

Process-based targets for the practitioner should be based on the principles of best practice for early years education in the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* (page 5) and linked to the sections: ‘What children do’ and ‘What does the practitioner need to do next?’ Practitioners should also be aware of the main findings of the *EPPE* research:

- effective pedagogy is both ‘teaching’ and the provision of instructive learning environments and routines;
- the most effective settings provide both teacher-initiated group work and freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities;
- excellent settings tend to achieve an equal balance between adult-led and child-initiated interactions and activities;
- cognitive outcomes relate to focused group work planned and initiated by practitioners and the amount of sustained shared thinking between practitioners and children;
- the curriculum is differentiated according to age;
- research findings support the general approach to learning in the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage*;
the most highly qualified staff provide the most direct teaching, but also the kind of interactions which guide but do not dominate children’s thinking;

- less-qualified staff perform significantly better when supervised by qualified practitioners.

The development of whole-school curricular targets should take place in the context of the review and if necessary the improvement of the conditions for learning following the above findings.

In some areas, the new requirements for LA targets around Early Years outcomes will mean work on improving alignment between services at LA level.

**Developing the foundations of curricular target setting in ISP schools, birth to five, in Kent**

As part of their work in the pilot, Kent developed the alignment across the range of teams in the LA and have summarised this process as follows.

- Early Years Advisers met with the lead consultant for ISP, who gave the team an overview of the Intensifying Support Programme.
- Early Years Advisers examined the DfES materials and were able to identify how the *Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage* had been used to support the completion of the target grid.
- Good Foundation Stage practice in ISP schools was identified for the pilot, due to the limited timescale of the development work.
- Members of the Early Years Team met with the ISP consultants, who were already working with the identified schools.
- ISP consultants, the Early Years Team and the Foundation Stage teachers met to discuss the DfES document *Developing the foundations for curricular target setting in ISP schools birth to five* and agreed a plan of action.
- The following research question provided a framework for their task: ‘How does effective practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage support the layered targets in ISP schools?’
- Teachers were asked to consider:
  - routine – balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities;
  - environment – inside and outside the school;
  - planning – balance of all areas of learning;
  - focus for learning – theme, medium- and short-term;
  - child-initiated learning;
  - focus for teaching – knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes.
- Teachers were asked to keep a working diary that described progress through the project.
Early Years Advisers visited their link schools and supported the teachers in completing their layered target grids from the school Raising Attainment Plan (RAP). Initially a language target was chosen by all schools.

Statements were taken from appropriate levels of the ‘What does the practitioner need to do?’ section of the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage.

By highlighting the statements, in different colours, teachers were able to identify whether they would be achieved through the routine, environment, child-initiated or teacher-directed activities.

Teachers were then able to link the grid with their medium- and short-term planning and to share the information with their support staff and colleagues in school. This proved to be manageable.

Midway through the project the teachers met with the Early Years Advisers and ISP consultants to discuss their work and any issues arising from it. From the work, photographs and enthusiasm among the teachers it was very evident how the target was being met in their environments. For example, if the target was about improving writing, teachers created rich opportunities for writing to take place. They established an environment with stimulating resources, in which everything was clearly labelled, and that would encourage independent writing and thus support the children appropriately in their own self-initiated activities.

At the end of this meeting the teachers felt confident enough to write up their action research diaries. It was agreed that teachers would produce these in their own individual styles.

Early Years Advisers explained that more emphasis could be placed on making the target evident in the environment. They identified how to improve the environment further, indoors and out, and how best to use the themes and children’s interests to support the target. The inside and outside environments were reorganised, with resources carefully chosen to support the targets.

At an evaluation meeting, teachers brought their diaries and work with them, to discuss with each other. Children’s learning had been accelerated by teachers making more focused observations, identifying relevant and challenging next steps and implementing them. Further issues were raised, such as how the mathematics targets were more challenging to support during child-initiated time.

Teachers enthused about the pilot and the impact it had had on the children’s learning, their support staff and their schools, as well as their own practice.
Foundation Stage/Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) Pilot

Background

Curricular target-setting in the Intensifying Support Programme

The ISP is a school improvement programme targeted at the schools below the floor target. It places emphasis on developing a whole-school approach to raising standards, improving teaching and learning, improving the conditions for learning and developing the school as a learning community.

As part of the process of improvement and review, schools identify priorities from data analysis and self-evaluation. These priorities or focuses can be drawn from information and evidence from the Foundation Stage and Key Stages 1 and 2, and addressed at whole-school level. These whole-school curricular focuses are then translated into year-group targets based on age-related expectations, linked into the planning, teaching and assessment cycle. The process is illustrated in Figure 1: Identifying learning focuses to support the whole-school curricular target.

Curricular targets are used to support:

- whole-school improvement, raising standards and accelerating progress through the use of age-related targets to raise expectations and aspirations for children and adults;
- development of a whole-school approach to, and accountability for, school improvement;
- the identification of whole-school priorities and areas for development.

The process of layering curricular targets in the ISP

Curricular targets are translated into year group targets based on age-related expectations; they steer improvements, guide teaching and set the focus for future assessments linked to what has been taught. Curricular targets for year groups also set out targets for classes, groups and individual children, where appropriate. Basing these targets on the children’s personal achievements helps them to recognise how well they are doing. Such targets support children’s own assessments of what they need to do next to progress. The process of curricular target setting is already well established and effective in many primary schools and settings. Many schools and settings and LAs have established mechanisms to analyse National Assessment Agency (NNA/QCA) test data to identify particular areas of strength and weakness in English, mathematics and science, and to translate these into class or school targets. Most schools and settings that are successfully using curricular targets have embedded their use within literacy and mathematics, and recognise their application within other curriculum areas.

Planning and assessment for learning; Assessment for learning Professional development materials pp. 21–29 (DfES 0521-2004G)
Context

Monitoring of the ISP during the pilot phase (2002–4) and in the first year of the extension (2004–5) showed that inclusion of the Foundation Stage within the whole school programme and support for curricular target setting within the Foundation Stage curriculum was variable. In response to this, the draft guidance for supporting the foundations of target setting was introduced through Foundation Stage Conferences and ISP Training in the summer and autumn terms 2005. All ISP LAs were encouraged to disseminate the materials and 18 local authorities were invited to participate in a more formal piloting phase (2005–6). Funding was offered to support the writing of case studies.

Alongside the trialling of the guidance and process, the suggested focuses for this pilot work included:

- local work to strengthen:
  - implementation of Birth to three matters and the Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage;
  - alignment across local authority teams to support the Foundation Stage in ISP schools;
  - assessment and moderation of the Foundation Stage and KS1 teacher assessment;
- links to Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) and Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets for Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED) and Communication, Language and Literacy (CLL) where these were being negotiated;
- links to the Early Reading Development Pilot (ERDP), now known as Communication, Language and Literacy Development (CLLD), where this was being introduced;
- introducing the PSED, Communicating matters and SEAL training materials;
- work with:
  - assessment and moderation of the Foundation Stage and KS1 teacher assessment feeder PVI settings;
  - other classes/phases in the school;
  - other schools that share the same feeder settings;
- exploring how developing a ‘next steps’ approach supports attainment in other areas of learning.

Fifteen local authorities received funding to facilitate the pilot work during the autumn and spring terms (2005–6), with case studies being completed in the summer term.

Feedback from the pilot phase has been very positive in terms of the usefulness of the materials and the impact on practice at both LA and school level. The LA case studies are available on the attached CD-ROM.
The following areas have been identified, both in terms of learning outcomes and potential areas for further development:

- alignment and partnership working within the LA, and at school level;
- the conditions for learning;
- learning and teaching in schools;
- the professional learning community.

Learning from the Foundation Stage/ISP Pilot

Local authorities and schools were generous in sharing their learning through the pilot. Messages from across the country were surprisingly similar and are summarised as follows.

Alignment and partnership working within the LA

- Alignment at LA level is crucial, so that where there is a considerable amount of support from a range of consultants going into the school, messages are consistent and targets in different key stages are given appropriate priority.

The conditions for learning

- The quality and quantity of adult–child interactions and interactions between children have been recognised and promoted.
- Continuous provision areas, for example, graphics and numeracy areas, have improved to support whole-school focuses across the six areas of learning.
- The improvement of the organisation and the quality of both indoor and outdoor learning environments to support child-initiated play or interaction linked to the curricular target focuses is an important area for evaluation and review.
- Reflective practice at both leadership and practitioner level is essential to support self-evaluation and change.
- Target setting must involve practitioners in thinking about the conditions for learning, the adult role and how young children learn.

Learning and teaching in schools

- Expectations of children’s potential have been raised.
- This curricular target-setting approach can support and enhance practice in the Foundation Stage.
- Practitioners have moved from a very structured approach in their use of time to more flexible timetabling, which is more consistent with the Foundation Stage curriculum.
- Developing whole-school understanding of how children learn in the Foundation Stage is crucial.
- Promotion of a ‘bottom up’ rather than a ‘top down’ approach to target-setting in the Foundation Stage, with targets developed in focused activities and through enhancements in each continuous provision area, promotes building of self-confidence, self-esteem and success for future development.
• The approach has promoted a more intense focus on learning and, in particular, the stages in learning through which children will need to go in order to be successful.

• This work has emphasised the importance of drawing on all six areas of learning when thinking about reading, writing and mathematics targets, rather than securing them in isolation.

• Curricular targets need to be addressed through all areas of learning, and opportunities to teach, practise and embed the curricular targets need to be identified through all areas of the Foundation Stage curriculum. The learning journey for the child is then more meaningful because the links between areas of learning are identified.

• This curricular target approach, using all six areas of learning in the Foundation Stage, can influence the whole-school target-setting approach through application of literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum.

The professional learning community

• Work has provided an opportunity to refocus on promoting school-parent links, such as parents’ notice boards, communicating curricular targets: ‘We are learning to… Please help us by…’.

• Where work within the pilot was shared across the school, it helped raise the status of the Foundation Stage and develop a better understanding of Early Years practice.

Next steps or areas for further development

In terms of national feedback, there was considerable cohesion in the steps that the LAs intend to take next to build on the success they had achieved:

1. Improve alignment and partnership working within the LA and at school level

• Promote continuing opportunities to work in an ‘interdepartmental way’, focusing on supporting the needs of learners from birth to 11.

• Continue to develop communication links within the LA with providers in the private and voluntary sectors.

• Develop further liaison between Foundation Stage and literacy and numeracy coordinators in schools.

2. Develop the conditions for learning

• Continue to develop continuous provision areas to support whole-school curricular target focuses, for example:
  – more opportunities for writing in role-play areas;
  – develop use of different themes;
  – introduce books into all the areas;
  – develop use of games for mathematics.

• Use observations more effectively.
Improving outcomes for children in the Foundation Stage in maintained schools

- Encourage development of Foundation Stage training to Year 1 staff and leadership teams to support transition from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 1.
- Involve children more in the assessment process.

3. **Emphasise reflectivity in the context of learning and teaching in schools**

- Make more explicit reference to speaking and listening, through the inclusion of an element of verbal explanation within the target statements.
- Training for teaching assistants on effective learning and teaching in the Foundation Stage.
- Continue to ‘fine tune’ the use of observation to inform future planning.
- Work with headteacher and senior leaders to support monitoring and evaluation of the Foundation Stage.

4. **Strengthen the professional learning community**

- Encourage further development of parental partnerships.
- Continue to engage with parents or carers through sharing of observations and planning of next steps.
- Stress the importance of ensuring Foundation Stage has a section in the Action Plan, the Raising Attainment Plan (RAP) or appears explicitly within school strategic planning.
- Develop understanding of the Early Years curriculum among school colleagues.

The LAs participating in the pilot have found that these strategies are the most effective way of improving Foundation Stage outcomes for all children and, in particular, for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
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TTA (2004) Foundation Stage Audit materials TEA0312/1p/20K/fmp/mar04

Web-based materials

Choice for Parents, the Best Start for Children: A ten year strategy for childcare
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk./pre_budget_report/prebud_pbr04/assoc_docs/prebud_pbr04_adchildcare.cfm
Continuing the Learning Journey
http://www.qca.org.uk/15005.html
Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage
http://www.qca.org.uk/223.html
Early Years Foundation Stage (publication 2007): information is updated regularly on the Sure Start Website http://www.surestart.gov.uk
For example, http://www.surestart.gov.uk/improvingquality/ensuringquality/eyfsconsultation/

EPPE: Effective Provision of Pre-school Education
http://www.surestart.gov.uk/research/keyresearch/eppe/
For further information on the EPPE project and published technical papers visit www.ioe.ac.uk/projects or telephone 020 7612 6219

Excellence and enjoyment: A strategy for primary schools
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63553/

Every Child Matters
http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk

Foundation Stage Profile Handbook
http://www.qca.org.uk/163.html

Intensifying Support Programme
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/isp

Observing children – Building the profile
http://www.qca.org.uk/14961.html

Principles into Practice
http://www.principlesintopractice.org

Learning and Teaching in the Primary Years

Parents: Partners in learning
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/1092095/

Primary Strategy website: information about the Renewed Framework is available on http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary
For example, corepapers are available on http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/features/primary/pri_fwk_corepapers/
and information on early reading is available on http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/rosereview/

Removing Barriers to Achievement
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/inclusion/883963/

Seeing step in children’s learning QCA/05/1546
http://www.qca.org.uk/13835.html

Special Educational Needs Code of Practice

SPEEL: Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning

Teacher Training Agency: contact details for publications

For further information on the EPPE project and published technical papers visit www.ioe.ac.uk/projects or telephone 020 7612 6219

A selection of research papers is available on http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research
For example:
Inequality in early cognitive development
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/early_years/ThuApr221020482004/
Long term contribution of early childhood education to children’s performance
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/themes/early_years/WedMar241201102004/